

4. Guidelines for New Construction

City of San Antonio Historic Design Guidelines

Office of Historic Preservation



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Using the Historic Design Guidelines

The City of San Antonio Historic Design Guidelines (“Historic Design Guidelines”) establish baseline guidelines for historic preservation and design. The Historic Design Guidelines apply to all **exterior** modifications for properties that are individually designated landmarks or within a locally designated historic district. All applicants are encouraged to review the Historic Design Guidelines early in their project to facilitate an efficient review process. In addition to compliance with the Unified Development Code (“UDC”), applicants must obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness (“COA”) from the Office of Historic Preservation (“OHP”) for all proposed exterior modifications as described in the Using the Historic Design Guidelines section of the Historic Design Guidelines. The Historic Design Guidelines are comprised of eight sections as follows:

- 1. Using the Historic Design Guidelines
- 2. Guidelines for Exterior Maintenance and Alterations
- 3. Guidelines for Additions
- **4. Guidelines for New Construction**
- 5. Guidelines for Site Elements
- 6. Guidelines for Signage
- 7. A Guide to San Antonio’s Historic Resources
- 8. Glossary

The Historic Design Guidelines as a whole are intended to work congruently with other sections, divisions and articles of the UDC but have been separated into individual sections for ease of use. In the event of a conflict between other sections or articles of the UDC and these Historic District Guidelines, the Historic District Guidelines shall control except in the case of signage where the more strict regulation or guideline shall control. Additionally, if an exception from the application of Chapter 28 of the city code of San Antonio has been approved for signage in historic districts, such exception shall remain unless removed by official action of the City Council. The meaning of any and all words, terms or phrases in the Historic District Guidelines shall be construed in accordance with the definitions provided in Appendix A of the UDC. In the case of a conflict regarding a definition as provided in these guidelines and Appendix A of the UDC, the Historic District Guidelines definition shall control. All images courtesy of the City of San Antonio, Clarion Associates, and Hardy, Heck, Moore, Inc. unless otherwise noted.

For questions and guidance please contact the Office of Historic Preservation: Email: ohp@sanantonio.gov | Phone: 210.215.9274

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Why Preserve?

A message from Historic Preservation Officer, Shanon Shea Miller

We strive to preserve San Antonio's historic buildings and neighborhoods for many reasons. We recognize and celebrate the cultural, aesthetic, environmental and economic value historic preservation brings to San Antonio. It is by definition sustainable and is a proven economic development tool. No example in this country of successful central city revitalization has occurred without preservation as a component.



- Preserving our built environment helps tell the **story** of San Antonio's long, rich and diverse history. Taking care of our older buildings and neighborhoods provides a sense of belonging, a collective memory, and a sense of pride in our past. Preservation is about understanding that historic buildings are limited resources and we must be careful to preserve those that tell our many and varied stories. This includes not just major historic sites but neighborhood schools and parks, streets lined with bungalows, theaters, small-scale commercial buildings, shot gun houses, gas stations, and towering downtown landmarks.
- Preservation helps build strong **neighborhoods** by protecting their character. Preservation programs foster community pride, appreciation of history, learning, creativity, and a sense of place, thus making historic neighborhoods desirable places to live and work.



- Preservation is good for the **economy**. Reinvesting in our historic buildings and neighborhoods helps to stabilize our property values and community, and promotes tourism and economic development. Historic preservation is more labor-intensive than new construction and generally utilizes more local materials. Every time a building is rehabilitated or reused, specialized trades and skilled laborers are employed. This creates jobs and puts more money into our local economy.
- Additionally, historic preservation contributes to the **tourism** industry in our city. Studies have shown that the heritage visitor stays longer and spends more than any other category of visitor. These people are looking for the jewels that locals cherish...often it's our historic buildings and neighborhoods that provide that sense of place and community that attracts visitors, while contributing to the quality of life for local citizens. As Donovan Rypkema says, "Place is not a synonym for location. Place is a location that has been claimed by feelings." For that and many other reasons, historic preservation is good for the local economy!

- Preservation helps protect the **environment**. Reusing and adapting historic buildings and neighborhoods reduces our consumption of raw land, new materials, and other resources. Rehabilitating existing buildings and maintaining existing materials are sustainable solutions and are most often more cost effective over the life of the building than replacement or new construction. Fortunately the green movement is recognizing that the greenest building ever built is the one that already exists! Stewardship of the built environment is sustainability as well as preservation.



We want our neighborhoods and commercial districts to continue to tell the story of San Antonio's history to those who come after us. This can best be done by preserving the condition of our historic resources and giving them new life and new purpose by making them our homes and places of business. The Historic Design Guidelines are intended to serve the community as we work together to preserve San Antonio's historic resources to provide a quality environment for future generation ***Preservation is not about longing for the past or resisting progress. It's about building on the past toward the future.***

Sharon

"Historic preservation has become a fundamental tool for strengthening American communities. It has proven to be an effective tool for a wide range of public goals including small business incubation, affordable housing, sustainable development, neighborhood stabilization, center city revitalization, job creation, promotion of the arts and culture, small town renewal, heritage tourism, economic development, and others."

- Donovan Rypkema, *Measuring Economic Impacts of Historic Preservation*, 2011



4. Guidelines for New Construction

Introduction

These guidelines provide guidance to property owners, design professionals, homeowners, and decision-makers regarding the construction of a new building within a historic district. They are not intended as a substitute for consultation with qualified architects, contractors, attorneys, City of San Antonio staff, and/or the Historic and Design Review Commission (“HDRC”). All applicants are responsible for the professional, legal and/or other services required for their project. Countless variables in the design and character of new construction exist within San Antonio’s historic districts. District-specific guidelines should address issues or elements that are unique within individual historic districts.

In considering whether to recommend approval or disapproval of an application for a COA for new construction, the HDRC shall be guided by the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, the UDC, the Historic Design Guidelines, and any additional design guidelines adopted by the City.

Applicability

The Historic Design Guidelines generally apply to all **exterior** modifications to properties that are located within a locally designated historic district or that are individually designated landmarks. This section specifically applies to all residential properties and non-residential or mixed-use properties new construction as follows:

- New primary buildings; and
- New accessory structures such as garages, sheds, or other outbuildings.

Guidelines

This section contains guidelines for residential and non-residential new construction as follows:

- Building and Entrance Orientation
- Building Massing and Form
- Materials and Textures
- Architectural Details
- Garages and Outbuildings
- Mechanical Equipment and Roof Appurtenances
- Designing for Energy Efficiency

These guidelines contain numerous pictures, illustrations, drawings, and examples of projects that have successfully met, or failed to meet, the qualities that the guidelines address. These examples are provided only to illustrate and show context. They shall not be construed as the only possible design solutions allowed.

General Principles

Each of San Antonio’s Historic Districts features a distinct set of site characteristics and architectural styles. As such, each new construction project will be reviewed within the context of its individual block and the surrounding historic district, as applicable. The following General Principles for New Construction will be considered during the review of new construction projects, in conjunction with the guidelines contained in this section:

Principle #1: Ensure that Historic Buildings Remain the Central Focus of the District

Carefully consider the historic context of the block and surrounding district when designing a new structure. New construction should be distinguishable from historic structures in the district without detracting from them.

Principle #2: False Historicism/Conjectural History is Discouraged

Attempting to create an exact replica of historic styles for new construction blurs the distinction between old and new buildings and makes the architectural evolution of the historic district more difficult to interpret. While new construction within historic districts should not attempt to mirror or replicate historic features, new structures should not be so dissimilar as to distract from or diminish the historic interpretation of the district.

Principle #3: Contemporary Interpretations of Traditional Designs and Details May be Considered

When applied to a compatible building form contemporary materials and architectural details can increase energy efficiency and provide visual interest while helping to convey the fact that the building is new.

1. Building and Entrance Orientation

Why is this Important?

Historic buildings and their front entrances are typically oriented towards the street, creating a rhythm and cohesiveness along the street frontage that helps define the overall character of the public right-of-way and district. When new construction is not oriented properly, that rhythm and cohesiveness is lost.



As is typical in San Antonio's historic districts, the front façade and entrances to these homes are oriented towards the street and front setbacks are consistent.



Typical of neighborhood commercial areas found in San Antonio's historic districts, these storefronts are aligned with the back of the sidewalk and their entrances are clearly visible along the street frontage.

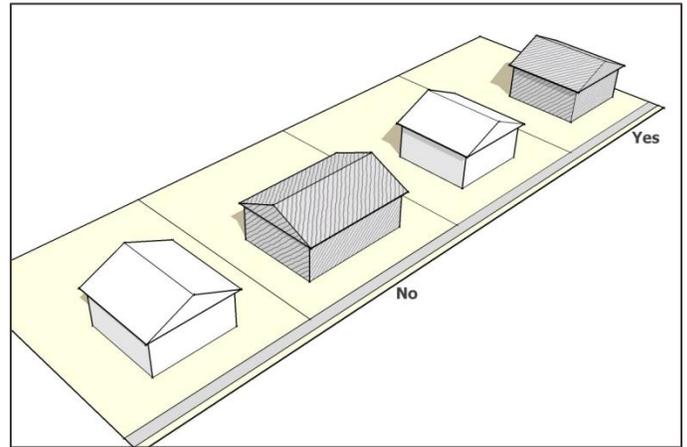
Guidelines

A. FAÇADE ORIENTATION

- i. **Setbacks**—Align front facades of new buildings with front facades of adjacent buildings where a consistent setback has been established along the street frontage. Use the median setback of buildings along the street frontage where a variety of setbacks exist. Refer to UDC Article 3, Division 2. Base Zoning Districts for applicable setback requirements.
- ii. **Orientation**—Orient the front façade of new buildings to be consistent with the predominant orientation of historic buildings along the street frontage.

B. ENTRANCES

- i. **Orientation**—Orient primary building entrances, porches, and landings to be consistent with those historically found along the street frontage. Typically, historic building entrances are oriented towards the primary street.



Orient new construction to be consistent with the predominate orientation of historic buildings along the street frontage.

This



Although building forms vary, consistent building and entrance orientation along the block create a pedestrian-friendly character in this neighborhood commercial district.

Not This



This new building is oriented to the street but does not contain an entry along the primary street frontage.



Entrances and front porches on this new multi-family project are oriented towards the street, consistent with nearby historic homes.



Entrances and balconies for this new multi-family project are oriented towards the side yard, disrupting the historic character of the streetscape and creating privacy concerns.



Use of a consistent front setback and building and entrance orientation for the new structures (left) maintain the consistency of the historic streetscape character.



A side-oriented entrance and blank street level façade on this new home conflicts with the pattern established by historic homes along the street frontage.

2. Building Massing and Form

Why is this Important?

New construction that is designed with a scale, mass, and form that is dramatically different when compared to historic buildings can appear out of place and detract from the district's character.



The new structure (right) utilizes a scale, mass, and form that complements the historic home at left and other historic homes along the block.



The compatibility of the new structure (left) is accomplished through the use of a similar scale and mass as the nearby historic structures (right) and the use of similar proportion of windows to wall area.

Guidelines

A. SCALE AND MASS

- i. **Similar height and scale**—Design new construction so that its height and overall scale are consistent with nearby historic buildings. In residential districts, the height and scale of new construction should not exceed that of the majority of historic buildings by more than one-story. In commercial districts, building height shall conform to the established pattern. If there is no more than a 50% variation in the scale of buildings on the adjacent block faces, then the height of the new building shall not exceed the tallest building on the adjacent block face by more than 10%.
- ii. **Transitions**—Utilize step-downs in building height, wall-plane offsets, and other variations in building massing to provide a visual transition when the height of new construction exceeds that of adjacent historic buildings by more than one-half story.
- iii. **Foundation and floor heights**—Align foundation and floor-to-floor heights (including porches and balconies) within one foot of floor-to-floor heights on adjacent historic structures.

B. ROOF FORM

- i. **Similar roof forms**—Incorporate roof forms—pitch, overhangs, and orientation—that are consistent with those predominantly found on the block. Roof forms on residential building types are typically sloped, while roof forms on non-residential building types are more typically flat and screened by an ornamental parapet wall.

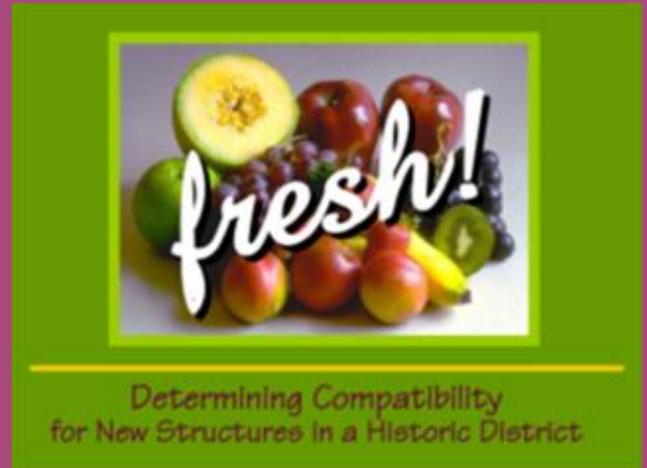
C. RELATIONSHIP OF SOLIDS TO VOIDS

- i. **Window and door openings**—Incorporate window and door openings with a similar proportion of wall to window space as typical with nearby historic facades. Windows, doors, porches, entryways, dormers, bays, and pediments shall be considered similar if they are no larger than 25% in size and vary no more than 10% in height to width ratio from adjacent historic facades.
- ii. **Facade configuration**—The primary facade of new commercial buildings should be in keeping with established patterns. Maintaining horizontal elements within adjacent cap, middle, and base precedents will establish a consistent street wall through the alignment of horizontal parts. Avoid blank walls, particularly on elevations visible from

the street. No new façade should exceed 40 linear feet without being penetrated by windows, entryways, or other defined bays.



FRESH – Determining Compatibility for New Structures in a Historic District



The “FRESH test,” developed by Pratt Cassidy, offers a method of determining the compatibility of new structures in historic districts. FRESH is an acronym standing for footprint, roof shape, envelope, skin, and holes. Principles include:

- The **FOOTPRINT** of the new structure should be similar to the footprints surrounding it.
- The new **ROOF** should match existing roofs in pitch, complexity, and orientation.
- The **ENVELOPE** of the new structure should match the existing in projections, bulk, height-to-width ratio, etc.
- New structures should be clad in a visually and physically similar material, or **SKIN**.
- **HOLES** – doors, windows, and other openings – should mimic the style and pattern of opening used on surrounding structures.

D. LOT COVERAGE

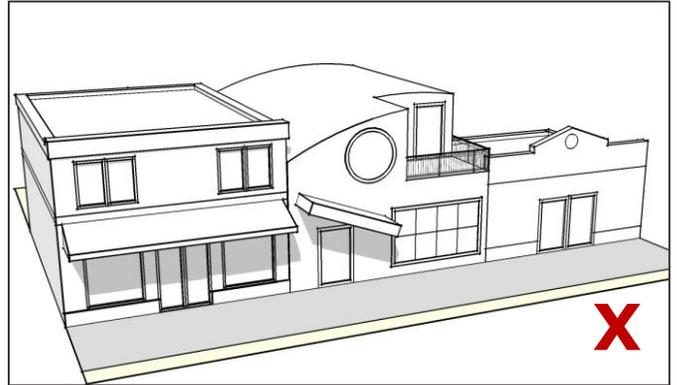
- i. **Building to lot ratio**— New construction should be consistent with adjacent historic buildings in terms of the building to lot ratio. Limit the building footprint for new construction to no more than 50 percent of the total lot area, unless adjacent historic buildings establish a precedent with a greater building to lot ratio.

This



Although much larger overall, the new construction (left) has similar roof form and “steps-down” in height to provide a more gradual transition to existing historic structures.

Not This



Although the new building (center) is similar in height and scale as the existing buildings, the roof form is inconsistent with those predominantly found on the block.



The scale, massing and roof form of the new home (center) is inconsistent with those predominantly found on the block.



The scale, massing, and form of the new structures above (top) and (bottom right) are generally consistent with nearby historic homes, helping to maintain a consistent rhythm along the street frontage.



Although the scale and massing of the new home (left) is compatible with historic homes on the block, the ratio and placement of windows to walls and foundation and floor heights varies considerably.

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3. Materials and Textures

Why is this Important?

Materials that are dramatically different in scale, texture, and proportion as those historically used in the district can result in new construction that appears out of place and detracts from the character of the historic district.



The materials and textures used on these new structures complement those traditionally found in the surrounding historic district.

Guidelines

A. NEW MATERIALS

- i. **Complementary materials**—Use materials that complement the type, color, and texture of materials traditionally found in the district. Materials should not be so dissimilar as to distract from the historic interpretation of the district. For example, corrugated metal siding would not be appropriate for a new structure in a district comprised of homes with wood siding.
- ii. **Alternative use of traditional materials**—Consider using traditional materials, such as wood siding, in a new way to provide visual interest in new construction while still ensuring compatibility.
- iii. **Roof materials**—Select roof materials that are similar in terms of form, color, and texture to traditionally used in the district.
- iv. **Metal roofs**—Construct new metal roofs in a similar fashion as historic metal roofs. Refer to the Guidelines for Alterations and Maintenance section for additional specifications regarding metal roofs.
- v. **Imitation or synthetic materials**—Do not use vinyl siding, plastic, or corrugated metal sheeting. Contemporary materials not traditionally used in the district, such as brick or simulated stone veneer and Hardie Board or other fiberboard siding, may be appropriate for new construction in some locations as long as new materials are visually similar to the traditional material in dimension, finish, and texture. EIFS is not recommended as a substitute for actual stucco.

B. REUSE OF HISTORIC MATERIALS

- i. **Salvaged materials**—Incorporate salvaged historic materials where possible within the context of the overall design of the new structure.

Materials and Textures for New Construction

- 1** Use materials and textures that are similar to those traditionally used in the district.
- 2** Do not use materials and textures that distract from the historic character of the district.



This new structure incorporates materials and textures that complement existing homes in the surrounding historic district.



These new structures use materials and textures, such as EIFS, corrugated metal and prefabricated panels, that are not typical of the surrounding historic district, distracting from adjacent historic structures.

4. Architectural Details

Why is this Important?

Attempting to create an exact replica of historic styles for new construction blurs the distinction between old and new buildings and makes the architectural evolution of the historic district more difficult to interpret. While new construction within historic districts should not attempt to mirror or replicate historic features, new structures should not be so dissimilar as to distract from or diminish the historic interpretation of the district.



New construction should incorporate forms and architectural details that complement nearby historic structures and the overall character of the historic district.

Guidelines

A. GENERAL

- i. **Historic context**—Design new buildings to reflect their time while respecting the historic context. While new construction should not attempt to mirror or replicate historic features, new structures should not be so dissimilar as to distract from or diminish the historic interpretation of the district.
- ii. **Architectural details**—Incorporate architectural details that are in keeping with the predominant architectural style along the block face or within the district when one exists. Details should be simple in design and should complement, but not visually compete with, the character of the adjacent historic structures or other historic structures within the district. Architectural details that are more ornate or elaborate than those found within the district are inappropriate.
- iii. **Contemporary interpretations**—Consider integrating contemporary interpretations of traditional designs and details for new construction. Use of contemporary window moldings and door surroundings, for example, can provide visual interest while helping to convey the fact that the structure is new. Modern materials should be implemented in a way that does not distract from the historic structure.

This



Although the architectural details used on the new structure at right are clearly contemporary, the home's compatible scale and massing create a seamless transition.

Not This



The new structure (right) unsuccessfully attempts to achieve compatibility by mimicking historic design elements found on surrounding homes in the district while disregarding issues of scale and massing.



This new structure incorporates architectural details that complement the surrounding historic district while maintaining a contemporary feel.



This new structure lacks sufficient architectural detail to be appropriate within a historic district.



The new structure (right), incorporates simple architectural details that complement those traditionally found in the historic district.



The new structure (right) incorporates a contemporary architectural character not traditionally found in the historic district. Such a stark contrast diminishes the integrity of the district.

5. Garages and Outbuildings

Why is this Important?

Outbuildings help define the character of the district and reinforce the character of the principle historic building. Historic outbuildings in San Antonio are limited in number and declining rapidly.



The architectural features of this outbuilding are similar in character to the primary historic building.



This new garage complements the character of the primary historic building while remaining subordinate to the primary structure.

Guidelines

A. DESIGN AND CHARACTER

- i. **Massing and form**—Design new garages and outbuildings to be visually subordinate to the principal historic structure in terms of their height, massing, and form.
- ii. **Building size** – New outbuildings should be no larger in plan than 40 percent of the principal historic structure footprint.
- iii. **Character**—Relate new garages and outbuildings to the period of construction of the principal building on the lot through the use of complementary materials and simplified architectural details.
- iv. **Windows and doors**—Design window and door openings to be similar to those found on historic garages or outbuildings in the district or on the principle historic structure in terms of their spacing and proportions.
- v. **Garage doors**—Incorporate garage doors with similar proportions and materials as those traditionally found in the district.

B. SETBACKS AND ORIENTATION

- i. **Orientation**—Match the predominant garage orientation found along the block. Do not introduce front-loaded garages or garages attached to the primary structure on blocks where rear or alley-loaded garages were historically used.
- ii. **Setbacks**—Follow historic setback pattern of similar structures along the streetscape or district for new garages and outbuildings. Historic garages and outbuildings are most typically located at the rear of the lot, behind the principal building. In some instances, historic setbacks are not consistent with UDC requirements and a variance may be required.

This



This historic garage has been sensitively adapted for an alternative use to complement the non-residential re-use of the primary structure.

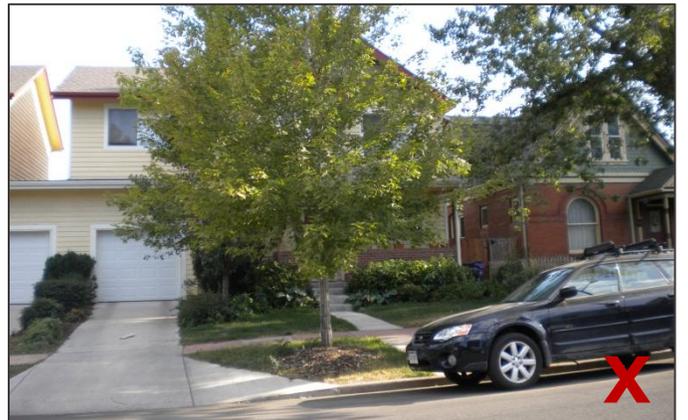
Not This



The scale and orientation of this new garage and driveway apron overwhelms the rear yard of this historic home and detracts from the historic streetscape character.



This new garage and accessory dwelling unit have been designed using compatible materials and architectural details to complement the primary structure.



Front-loaded garages should not be introduced through new construction on blocks where rear or alley-loaded garages were historically used.



This new garage is appropriately sited and scaled as to not detract from the historic primary structure.

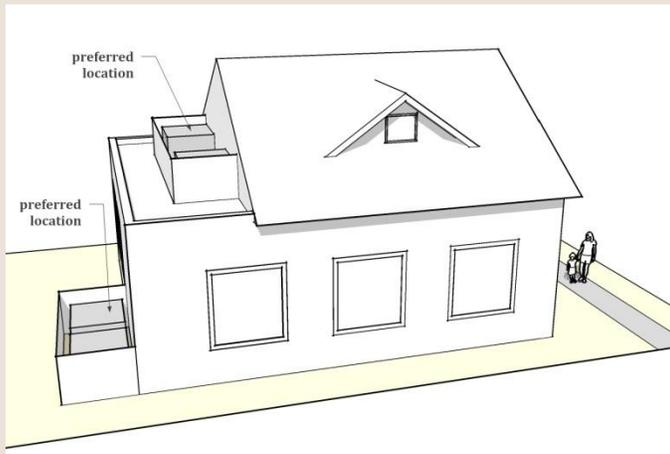
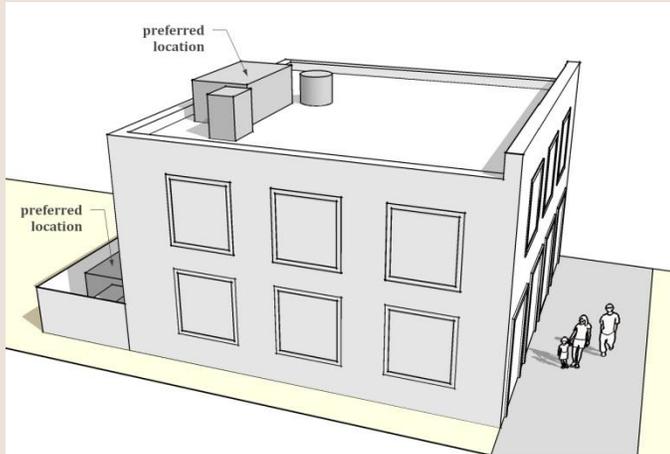


Adding an attached garage where one did not historically exist is not appropriate.

6. Mechanical Equipment and Roof Appurtenances

Why is this Important?

Without proper siting and screening, mechanical equipment and roof appurtenances can detract from the historic character of the building and can expose adjacent properties to noise, unsightly views, and other impacts.



Mechanical equipment and roof appurtenances should be located and screened so as to minimize their visibility from the public right-of-way and to not detract from the historic character of the building they serve or the surrounding district.

Guidelines

A. LOCATION AND SITING

- i. **Visibility**—Do not locate utility boxes, air conditioners, rooftop mechanical equipment, skylights, satellite dishes, and other roof appurtenances on primary facades, front-facing roof slopes, in front yards, or in other locations that are clearly visible from the public right-of-way.
- ii. **Service Areas**—Locate service areas towards the rear of the site to minimize visibility from the public right-of-way.

B. SCREENING

- i. **Building-mounted equipment**—Paint devices mounted on secondary facades and other exposed hardware, frames, and piping to match the color scheme of the primary structure or screen them with landscaping.
- ii. **Freestanding equipment**—Screen service areas, air conditioning units, and other mechanical equipment from public view using a fence, hedge, or other enclosure.
- iii. **Roof-mounted equipment**—Screen and set back devices mounted on the roof to avoid view from public right-of-way.

This



This utility box is located on a secondary façade and painted to match the color of the primary historic structure.

Not This



While the air conditioning unit is screened from view, the wall mounted utility box and other wires do not match the color of the building and distract from the overall character.



Air conditioning units should be located in a rear yard or along a secondary façade and screened from view.



Air conditioning units should not be placed on the primary façade of historic structures.



Rooftop mechanical equipment on this addition to a historic structure is screened from the public right-of-way.



Rooftop mechanical equipment should not be visible from the public right-of-way.

7. Designing for Energy Efficiency

Why is this Important?

The use of energy efficient building features, alternative energy sources, and site design techniques in additions and new construction can help conserve energy and water, reduce heating and cooling costs, and support citywide sustainability goals.



If designed and sited properly, energy and water efficient features such as the solar panels (top) and cistern (bottom) can be incorporated into historic districts with minimal visual impact. Ideally, such features should be located towards the rear of the property to minimize the visual impact on the public right-of-way.

Guidelines

A. BUILDING DESIGN

- i. **Energy efficiency**—Design additions and new construction to maximize energy efficiency.
- ii. **Materials**—Utilize green building materials, such as recycled, locally-sourced, and low maintenance materials whenever possible.
- iii. **Building elements**—Incorporate building features that allow for natural environmental control – such as operable windows for cross ventilation.
- iv. **Roof slopes**—Orient roof slopes to maximize solar access for the installation of future solar collectors where compatible with typical roof slopes and orientations found in the surrounding historic district.

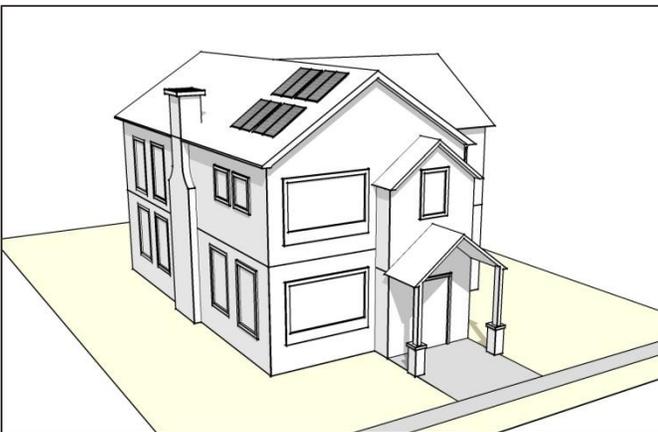
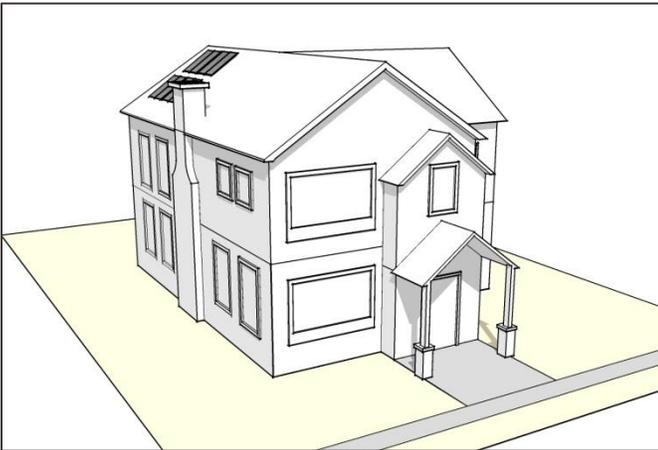
B. SITE DESIGN

- i. **Building orientation**—Orient new buildings and additions with consideration for solar and wind exposure in all seasons to the extent possible within the context of the surrounding district.
- ii. **Solar access**—Avoid or minimize the impact of new construction on solar access for adjoining properties.

C. SOLAR COLLECTORS

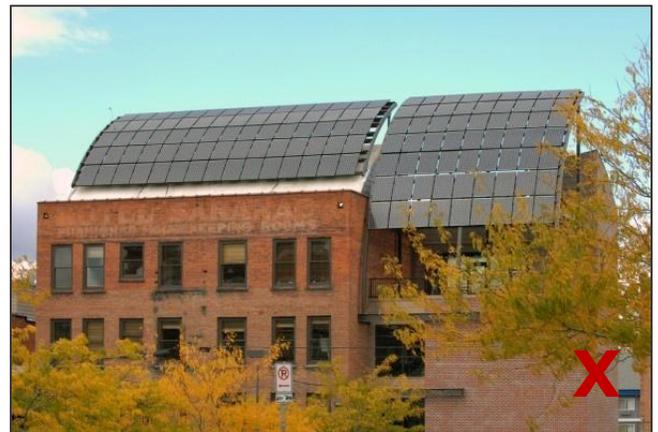
- i. **Location**—Locate solar collectors on side or rear roof pitch of the primary historic structure to the maximum extent feasible to minimize visibility from the public right-of-way while maximizing solar access. Alternatively, locate solar collectors on a garage or outbuilding or consider a ground-mount system where solar access to the primary structure is limited.
- ii. **Mounting (sloped roof surfaces)**—Mount solar collectors flush with the surface of a sloped roof. Select collectors that are similar in color to the roof surface to reduce visibility.
- iii. **Mounting (flat roof surfaces)**—Mount solar collectors flush with the surface of a flat roof to the maximum extent feasible. Where solar access limitations preclude a flush mount, locate panels towards the rear of the roof where visibility from the public right-of-way will be minimized.

This



Siting solar panels towards the rear of a visible roof surface or on a garage located at the rear of the property (top) is preferred to minimize the visual impact on the public right-of-way; however, where solar access is insufficient a more visible location (bottom) may be considered if panels are of a low profile and similar color as the roof surface.

Not This



Solar panels should be mounted flush with the surface of the roof to minimize their visibility from the public right-of-way, regardless of the building type they are attached to. The design and placement of solar panels should not create a visual distraction that detracts from the historic building they are mounted to.

Additional Resources

Incorporating Solar Panels in a Rehabilitation Project, ITS #52, by Jenny Parker.
<http://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/applying-rehabilitation/its-bulletins/ITS52-SolarPanels.pdf>

Did you know?

The greenest building is one that is already built. Take care to preserve materials, and avoid damaging the historic structure when installing new sustainable technologies.